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ABSTRACT

Correctionist models of error, problem, and omission presume that Standard English (SE) is the sole language variety of America. America's classrooms, however, are neither culturally nor linguistically monolithic. Instead, they are diverse, and current teaching metaphors do not reflect the linguistic and cultural realities of the classrooms. This paper offers a path through which the linguistic and cultural diversity of American classrooms may be affirmed, all the while assuring that children learn to command Standard English, a key tool required for full participation in the broader society. The paper tracks the story of Rachel's (the second author) journey as a third grade language arts teacher, showing how she moved from a correctionist to a contrastivist model of the language arts classroom. In doing so, the paper first presents evidence that the achievement gap Rachel witnesses in her own classroom and school is seen not only around her state of Virginia, but throughout the nation, across decades. It states that the field of applied linguistics underlies Rachel's work in the classroom--basic linguistic insight into the nature of language varieties showed her that the language of the home is not lacking in pattern but differently patterned. In the paper, the journey is charted in two voices, that of a university professor of English education (the first author) and that of Rachel, an elementary teacher who implements an inclusive language arts in her linguistically diverse, inner city classroom. The paper suggests that educators must revisit how they respond when students write and speak in spoken language patterns. (Contains 16 references.) (NKA)

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"My Goldfish Name is Scaley" is What We Say at Home: Code-Switching -- a Potent Tool for Reducing the Achievement Gap in Linguistically Diverse Classrooms.

By Rebecca S. Wheeler and Rachel Swords

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (91st, Baltimore, MD, November 15-20, 2001)

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"My goldfish name is Scaley" is what we say at home:
Code-switching -- a potent tool for reducing the achievement gap
in linguistically diverse classrooms

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Student: Mrs. Swords, why you always be teachin' math in the afternoon?
Mrs. Swords: Why do I always WHAT?
Student: Why you always be teaching math in the afternoon?
Mrs. Swords: Why do I what?
Student: Why you always *be teaching math* in the afternoon?
Mrs. Swords: We don't say, 'why you *be* teaching math in the afternoon…' We say, 'why *are* you always teaching math in the afternoon?
Student: Oh, ok.

But the next day the child would begin again, "Mrs. Swords, why do we always be having math in the afternoon?" And I would reply, "Why do we always WHAT?" It was always the same. I would attempt to "correct" the child's "error," but it was clear that no learning was taking place."

I began my te aching career, four years ago, by correcting every sentence I deemed incorrect. However, I noticed as time went on that my students were asking significantly fewer questions. I would call for questions and my students would begin: "Mrs. Swords, why you be… is you? Ain't you? Never mind." My students knew I was going to correct them. They tried to ask the question in the form I wanted, but they didn't know how. Rather than risk the embarrassment of being corrected in front of the class, they became silent.

When I realized why the questions had stopped, I tried another, more passive approach. When a child asked "Mrs. Swords, why you be teachin' maf afta lunch?" I would repeat their question in formal English ("Why do I always teach math after lunch?") and then answer it. While this method didn't embarrass my children or hinder their questioning, the children's language did not change. Even though I consistently corrected their speech and writing, my students did not learn the Standard English forms.

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Rachel was certainly not alone in her approach to child language. Other 3rd grade teachers of the Virginia Peninsula have responded in similar fashion to vernacular patterns.

For example, regarding 1-3,

1) I have two sister and two brother.
2) Christopher family moved to Spain.
3) Last year, he watch all the shows.

one teacher reflected: "when students use *incorrect grammar*, I generally like to *correct* them in a manner that does not embarrass them, but allows them to hear how the statement *should* sound… They should be able to carry on an educated, intelligent conversation" (Personal Communication 10/01).

Another teacher observed, "when we work as a group on grammar, correcting examples of daily oral language sentences, we brainstorm corrections. I show the children *the right way* to construct the sentences" (Personal Communication 10/01).

Rachel observes, "while these teachers use many different approaches for changing the grammar of their students, they are all still correctionist methods." She comments: "my own classroom experience has lead me to believe that students either respond negatively or do not respond at all to this type of correcting." For example, the following exchange was quite typical in Rachel's experience:

Student: The girl walk to the store yesterday.
Mrs. Swords: No, we say, 'the girl walk**ed** to the store yesterday.'
Student: That's what I said, 'the girl walk to the store yesterday.'

The child does not hear the teacher pointing to grammatical contrasts.

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The traditional approach:
The correctionist model – a metaphor of exclusion

Coursing through the traditional approach to student language is a united skein of metaphors: Teachers envision a single "right way" to construct a sentence, *one way* a statement *should* sound(Birch, 2001). Teachers believe that grammar is correct or incorrect and that examples such as 1-3 are error-filled and incorrect. Naturally, teachers try to "correct" the errors.

This is the correctionist model of language response.

The correctionist model diagnoses the child's home speech as 'poor English,' or 'bad grammar,' finding that the child 'does not know how to show plurality, possession, and tense,' or the child 'has problems' with these. A correctionist approach sees the student having 'left off,' the plural marker, the apostrophe –s, and –ed. Teachers attempt remedy with "that's not how you do it!" This approach attempts to eradicate the child's home language.

Correctionist metaphors of error, problem, and omission presume that Standard English (SE) is the sole language variety of America. However our classrooms are neither culturally nor linguistically monolithic. Instead, they are diverse. Our current teaching metaphors do not reflect the linguistic and cultural realities of our classrooms.

This paper will offer a path through which we may affirm the linguistic and cultural diversity of our classrooms, all the while assuring that our children learn to command Standard English (SE), a key tool required for full participation in our broader society.

Rachel reports, "I taught for 3 years under the correctionist model. Then I began Dr. Wheeler's class, *The Study of Language: Dialects in the Schools and Communities*. Before this class, I truly thought that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) was just bad English, kids who weren't speaking the right way. But after looking at the structural differences, and noticing that there are rules that govern this language, I have redone my whole writing program. Now, I teach language arts in a contrastive analysis way. I've learned a technique called code-switching that has been working magic with my third graders."

Rachel continues: "Everybody utilizes code switching to some degree. I, for example, have a rather thick southern accent. At home I might say, "I'm fixin' to go the store -- ya'll need anything?" However, I certainly wouldn't say to the teachers on my grade-level "I'm fixin' to make copies - ya'll need any." I know this language style is not appropriate at school. There, I might say, "I'm going to make some copies, do you need any?" When I make these language choices, I am code-switching. To code-switch is to choose the style of language appropriate to the context. This is what I want my students to be able to do – choose the language form appropriate to the time, place, audience and communicative purpose. To support my children in learning how to code-switch between informal and formal language patterns, we use a classroom technique called *contrastive analysis.*"

This paper will track the story of Rachel's journey as a 3rd grade language arts teacher, showing how she moved from a correctionist to a contrastivist model of the language arts classroom.

In doing so, we'll first present evidence that the achievement gap Rachel witnesses in her own classroom and school is seen not only around her state of Virginia, but throughout the nation, across decades. We'll ask why vernacular speakers seem to fall so far behind in school. Drawing upon evidence from the field of linguistics, we'll suggest that the contrasts in the grammatical structure between the language of the home and the language of the school may well constitute an important impediment to student success. Then, we will offer data suggesting that the contrastive approach is much more effective than the correctionist model in helping the child learn Standard English. In sum, we offer evidence that code-switching is a potent tool in the linguistically diverse classroom, fostering increased student learning, and holding promise to reduce the achievement gap in American Schools.

The field of applied linguistics underlies Rachel's work in the classroom. Basic linguistic insight into the nature of language varieties showed her that the language of the home is not lacking in pattern but differently patterned (Adger, Christian, & Taylor, 1999; Delpit, 1995; Labov, 1995; Perry & Delpit, 1998; Smitherman, 1981; Wolfram, Adger & Christian, 1999). This powerful insight permitted Rachel to move from seeing language structure as monolithic (i.e., SE as correct grammar) to a vantage which recognizes a rainbow of language varieties, each of which is appropriate to a given setting with a given audience. In this way, the linguistic study of language varieties offers us a key to a multicultural and multilingual pedagogy, all the while supporting the student's growing command of Standard English.

We chart our journey in 2 voices, that of a University English Education professor and that of an elementary teacher as she implements an inclusive language arts in her linguistically diverse, inner city classroom.

The correctionist model does not work:
Minority language students continue to suffer deep achievement gap

As Rachel observed, even though teachers have been correcting student language, literally for decades, the corrections don't seem to take. Vernacular speaking children often do not seem learn the skills they need to succeed in our school curricula and on our standardized tests. Rachel reports results from her school: "When last year's disaggregated scores for the Virginia Standards of Learning tests (SOL) were put up on the board, in *every* case, our Black children were performing much lower than our white children. It is very disheartening to say that I've taught the same way to all the children all year long and my white children are passing the tests and my Black children are not. Then our principal put up the scores for the entire district; it looked exactly the same. The African American vernacular speaking children are doing significantly worse on the writing test – not two or three points -- in some schools, African American students scored 36 points lower than white children on average."

Other elementary schools on the Virginia peninsula show the same startling contrasts between the achievement of vernacular speaking children and children speaking the mainstream language variety. With African American student populations of 60 – 80%, six inner city Virginia elementary schools are at risk for losing accreditation due to low student performance. Third grade performance exemplifies the achievement gap: With results disaggregated by race, we see significant disparity between Black and white success rates on the Virginia State Standards based tests for reading/literature/writing (Spring 2000). The percentages of students achieving passing scores at 6 local elementary schools were as follows: A. (Black 32%/White 63%); B. Elementary (Black 46%/White 63%); C. (Black 31%/White 48%); D. (Black 53%/White 74%), E. (Black 49%/White 100%); F. (Black 36%/White 81%). Thus, Black students scored as little as 17 percentage points below white students, but as much as 45 – 51 percentage points below whites.

Spring 2000 results for writing show similarly disheartening performance by African American students. The percentages of students achieving passing scores were as follows: A. (Black 45%/White 77%); B. (Black 68%/White 76%); C. (Black 41%/White 71%); D. (Black 64%/White 82%), E. (Black 45%/White 86%); F. (Black 48%/White 83%). On writing, African Americans scored as little as 8 percentage points below whites, but in 4 schools out of 6, scored at least 30 points below whites and as much as 41 percentage points below Caucasian students. Thus, African American students on the Virginia peninsula perform at levels significantly below that of their European descent classmates as measured on objective instruments of academic assessment.

Such disparities of language performance are neither isolated nor restricted to Virginia. Thus, in 1996, Stanford linguist and AAVE scholar, John Rickford, reported the results of a 1990 study of student writing performance. This study revealed that

> third grade kids in the primarily white, middle class Palo Alto School District scored on the 94th percentile in writing; by the [sixth] grade, they had topped out at the 99[th] percentile. By contrast, third grade kids in primarily African American working class East Palo Alto (Ravenswood School District) scored on the 21st percentile in writing, but by the sixth grade, they had fallen to the 3rd percentile, almost to the very bottom (Rickford, 1996).

From coast to coast, the story remains the same. We've heard already from Virginia and California. Now back to the East coast, the North Carolina State Board of Education, and Department of Public Instruction have urged that "fundamental changes are needed in the way schools and school systems operate to close the gaps in achievement" (12/05/01). The North Carolina Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps found that

> even though North Carolina as a whole has experienced an increase in student achievement, there has been little improvement in closing gaps by race and poverty within the student population. [Indeed, even] when poverty is factored out, middle class white students still score significantly higher than middle class African American students. (North Carolina State Board of Education/Department of Instruction, 2001).

Of course, the U.S. Federal Government itself has re-affirmed its commitment to reducing the achievement gap when President Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (No Child Left Behind, 2001).

Clearly, minority language children are confronting a brick wall when it comes to performing in the public schools, a fact that is not new. John Rickford, Stanford linguistics professor specializing in AAVE, works in teacher education and the public schools. His research has indicated that "the longer African American inner city kids stay in school, the worse they do" (Rickford, 1996).

William Labov, University of Pennsylvania scholar of AAVE, has similarly reported: "It is necessary to accept certain facts about the failure to teach reading in inner city schools. The problems that we face today are as great or greater as those that we confronted thirty years ago" (1995, p. 40). Labov writes, "the relative position of African-American students [in reading performance] declines steadily throughout the school process" (1995, p. 43). Labov continues: "the most important point is that young children from the inner city do not start out with the grave handicap they end up with…the overall picture is that young black children arrive at kindergarten full of enthusiasm for the educational adventure, with a strong motivation to succeed from their parent or parents. The pattern of reading and educational failure that follows is progressive and cumulative. Though it may be conditioned by early handicaps, it is largely the result of events and interactions that take place during the school years" (1995, pp. 43-44).

Why do vernacular speakers stumble so hard in our schools?

The question is '*Why?*' Why do African American vernacular speaking students stumble hard in our schools? If we can answer that, next we must wonder how precisely we ought proceed.

A range of elementary teachers on the VA peninsula are convinced that African American students do poorly on the standardized tests not because they fail to command the *content* of the tests, but instead, because they experience great difficulties understanding the *language* of the test questions (Personal Communication, April 2001).

What constitutes the language obstacle and what might be our pedagogical response? These are central questions this paper seeks to answer. We maintain that the correctionist model of language has long and demonstrably failed our children. For over 30 years, the achievement gap has persisted, and still persists. And yet, we have classroom evidence of a powerful alternative that shows strong promise in reaching African American vernacular speaking students. Let's look at the results from both Chicago and Georgia. In Chicago, Hanni Taylor explored the effectiveness of the correctionist and the contrastivist models approaches to student writing. While her work, Project Bidialectalism, centered in an inner city college composition program, her results were echoed at the elementary level in Georgia, so we offer them here.

In the experimental class, Taylor led her students in explicit discovery, contrasting the grammatical patterns of AAVE and SE. In the control group, she used "traditional English department techniques," focusing uniquely on how the students should produce Standard English structures (Taylor, 1991, p. 148).

After 11 weeks, while the control group, using the correctionist model, showed an 8.5% *increase* in African American features, the experimental group, using contrastive analysis, showed a remarkable 59.3% *decrease* in African American vernacular features (Taylor, 1991, p. 149). Taylor observed that students had been neither "aware of their dialect" nor of "grammatical black English features that interfere in their writing" (150). By contrasting the language varieties, students were able to learn the detailed differences between the two language varieties thereby "limit[ing] AAE intrusions into their SE usage" (Rickford, 1997). Hanni Taylor's work suggests that a contrastivist model holds strong promise for reducing the achievement gap in America.

Moving south, teachers in DeKalb County, Georgia, also help young speakers of minority dialects explicitly contrast their home speech with the standard. Thus, when a fifth-grader answers a question with a double negative ("not no more"), the teacher prompts the student to "code-switch," to which the student replies, "not any more." The *Atlanta Constitution* reported that in this "Bidialectal Communication" program, the children learn to switch from their home speech to school speech at appropriate times and places, and that "the dialect they might use at home is valuable and 'effective' in that setting, but not for school, for work – or for American democracy" (Cumming, 1997). This program has been designated a "center of excellence" by the National Council of Teachers of English.

In sum, 'teaching methods which DO take vernacular dialects into account in teaching the standard work better than those which DO NOT" (Rickford, 1997).

The question then becomes -- how do we, as classroom teachers and university partners, move from a correctionist model to a contrastivist one in our daily classroom lives? The rest of this paper provides a tangible answer to that question. In what follows, we first describe the key traits of a contrastivist model, and discuss several specific examples drawn from 3rd grade writing.

Then, Rachel speaks about her experiences as an inner city 3rd grade teacher, as she left behind the correctionist paradigm to embrace a contrastivist approach as the most effective way to teach Standard English.

A linguistically-informed model:
The contrastivist approach – a metaphor of inclusion

The central insight to the contrastivist model is this: language comes in diverse varieties. Each variety is regular, systematic, and rule-governed. Based on this insight, the contrastivist model recognizes the child's home speech as different (not deficient) in structure from school speech: Home speech is patterned and rule-governed just as school speech is patterned and rule-governed. Crucially, this means that when the child speaks or writes in home speech, she or he is *not making mistakes in Standard English*; instead, the child is following the regular, systematic language patterns of the vernacular language variety.

Recognizing pattern, teachers are then equipped to leave the metaphor of correction, and enter the model of contrast. When a teacher recognizes that a child is not making errors in Standard English but is following the patterns of the home speech vernacular, a whole new approach to student language opens. When responding to student language as in 1-3, the teacher can recognize that the students *do* know how to show possession. They are following a vernacular pattern for possession. Perceiving this, the teacher is able to affirm what the child does know, as a bridge to new knowledge. Thus, a teacher might respond, "Yes, Rajid! That's how informal speech shows possession. Now let's add another way – the formal pattern for possession."

Example 4 offers a sample of how contrastive analysis handles a range of grammatical structures -- possession, plurality and tense. Relying on the insight that language varieties exhibit regular, systematic patterning, the contrastivist model seeks to *evenhandedly* describe both the language patterns of the home and school. In example 4a-c, we name the grammatical point (e.g., Possession), and then give an example of that grammatical pattern in both home and school speech. We then describe the traits of the pattern, using a contrastivist approach.

4) Possession/Plurality/Tense

a. Possession
- Home Speech: *Christopher family moved to Spain*
  - Possession is shown by adjacency (the possessor occurs next to and before the thing possessed)
- School Speech: *Christopher's family moved to Spain*
  - Possession is shown by adding 's to the possessor

b. Plurality
- Home Speech: *I have 2 sister and 2 brother*
  - Plurality is shown by number words, or by the context
- School Speech: *I have 2 sisters and 2 brothers*
  - Plurality is shown by number words and by adding -s to the noun
  -

c. Tense and time reference
   - Home Speech: *Last year, he watch all the shows*
     - Past time is shown by adverbial phrases in the sentence or paragraph (note: Chinese shows time the same way: *Yesterday, I go to the store. Today, I go to the store. Tomorrow I go to the store.*)
   - School Speech: *Last year, he watched all the shows*
     - Past tense is (usually) shown by adding -ed to the main verb

In the contrastive approach, we do not see home speech as "missing an 's' for plural, or possessive" and we don't diagnose the speaker as making errors or having problems with tense. Instead, we recognize that the patterns of the home may be different from the patterns of school speech. Accordingly, the teacher does not need to "correct" the informal language patterns. Instead, through contrastive analysis, teachers help children become explicitly aware of the grammatical differences. Knowing this, children learn to *code-switch* between the language of the home and the language of the school as appropriate to the time, place, audience, and communicative purpose. As seen by Hanni Taylor in Chicago and John Rickford in California, the child who is able to say, "in my dialect we say it like this," will do a better job of learning Standard English than the child who has been told that his or her home speech is "wrong."

Crucially, we are *not* saying, "anything goes." We are not ignoring language, and we are not "making allowances" for home speech. To the contrary, we pay considerable attention to helping the child become explicitly aware of how to choose the language appropriate to the time, place, audience and purpose. We are not implying that the child does not need to learn Standard English -- quite the contrary -- in order to function productively in the broader American society, all children need to command Mainstream American English, the language variety often required in formal settings– a job setting, an interview, in a business communication, etc. Now, let's turn to Rachel's story and see how she has integrated code-switching into her 3rd grade classroom.

Rachel's classroom journey: How to move from correction to contrast

I began using a contrastive teaching method shortly after I started Dr. Wheeler's MAT class, *The Study of Language: Dialects in the Schools and Communities*. I started with writing because it is easier to change than spoken language. In writing, you have an opportunity to edit.

I noticed the intrusion of vernacular patterns in many of my students' writings. As a correctionist, I would have explained what we do and do not say. For example, a student wrote, "the three friend went for a walk." My initial reaction was to correct my student's grammar by explaining the need for an –s on the end of plural nouns. However, I decided to use the contrastive approach. I began by teaching whole group lessons to address this new approach.

Using chart paper, I created two columns of sentences drawn from my students' own writing. The left column was written in Standard English and the right column showed the same sentences written in the vernacular, the style that many of my students speak. I labeled the SE examples as "formal/written language" and used "informal/spoken language" for the vernacular

side. I started out with the plural nouns, because I knew that my students would immediately see the difference between the formal and informal usage.

We compared and contrasted the sentences in each column (see photo). For example, the students looked at the sentences "I have two dog" and "I have two dogs." Immediately, one of my kids said, "Oh, that's wrong. All the ones on that side (the informal/spoken side) are wrong and the ones on the other side are right." But one of my other children said, "How is it wrong? Ms. S. wrote it!" My students were clearly confused. After all, since this was my second year of working with these children, I had spent more than a year teaching them the right and wrong way to construct a sentence, and so they couldn't figure out why I would purposely write an incorrect sentence.

To address the students' confusion, I initiated a conversation about the different ways people express themselves. I told my children to think of the way different people talk and asked them to pick one person whose voice they could imitate. Each child then spoke as that person might. They had a lot of fun imitating my voice, the principal's voice, and the voice of various celebrities. They imitated accents as well as grammatical features. Clearly, the children already possessed an intuitive grasp that our language varies by place, time, audience, and purpose.

Then, referring to the chart, I asked the students if they understood the meaning of each of the sentences. The students affirmed, "yes!" I asked if the sentence on the informal side, "I have 2 dog," had the same meaning as the sentence on the formal side, "I have 2 dogs." Again, the class agreed that they did. Next, I asked, "if we can tell what they mean, what differences do you see between the two columns?"

Since we have talked about nouns and pronouns since second grade, the children were easily able to articulate their responses. One child explained, "in this one (the written form), the noun has an –s on it." I asked, "what does that mean? What is the –s doing there?" They said, "it's making it more than one." We talked about how the –s makes it more than one. I then explained that this is the way we show more than one in the formal language. This is the way that I expect them to write in the classroom.

Then we looked at the spoken/informal example and explored its pattern and how it contrasts with the written, formal example: Since the examples meant the same, I asked the children how the informal sentence shows us that the number is more than one. A kid said, "you know it's more than one because it has the number 'two' in it." So I wrote that down below the column on informal examples "number words tell if a noun is plural." Then we looked at "Taylor likes cat." There's nothing in that sentence that tells you it's more than one cat. The children said, "you have to look at the whole paragraph." So I wrote, "other words in the paragraph tell if the noun is plural." Next we looked at "all the boy are here today." I asked, "what tells you that there is more than one boy?" One child replied, "the other words in the sentence – all of…" So, I wrote on our chart, "other words in the sentence tell if a noun is plural." Thus, the children themselves explored and named the contrasts in grammatical patterning between formal and informal language. Our plural chart (along with charts for possessive and tense) stay up on our classroom walls for easy reference during the school day (photo 2).

When my children write, I remind them about the patterns that we use in written language. I do not make any judgments about the correctness of a sentence. Instead, I make it clear that I expect them to use certain patterns in their writing that are not always present in spoken language.

I have seen tremendous growth in my students in the editing of their work. Prior to teaching code-switching my students simply guessed what was expected of them. One student explained why they used to guess: "It's because you don't know how to say it and you're just wondering how you're suppose to say it." However, now that I teach contrastive analysis, my students are self-correcting and are no longer confused about how something should be written. Further, students are much more receptive to changing their work to reflect the formal language patterns than they were to being corrected.

After the students are able to code-switch effectively in their writing, they would then be introduced to the various situations that require formal speech. I have begun the introduction to formal speech by having my students read their written work out loud. This allows the child who did the writing to practice formal speech and the rest of the class to listen for formal speech patterns. Although I do not require my students to speak in formal language, we have discussed when we would use formal and informal language. During one class meeting on the subject, one child compared code-switching to the school dress code. He explained that we dress up for school because it is an important place, and so we must speak formally. However, at home, we dress in jeans and tee shirts because home is an informal place where informal speech is used. This insight clearly illustrates the abilities of students to use code-switching in both written and spoken language.

Rachel responds to FAQs
Q. How can you condone home speech?
A. Everyone switches between different levels of formality in language.

Some teachers have voiced concerns, explaining they can't see home speech as OK under any circumstances. In reply, I note that everyone speaks some form of informal English during the day. For example, when our spouse asks, "Where ya goin'?" we may respond with a fragment, "To the store. " But if the superintendent asked, "Where are you going" we might well respond more formally, "I expect to go to the bookstore soon." Thus, even though we may speak casually at home or among friends, when in more formal settings, we routinely switch to the patterns of formal speech. This is what we're teaching our students -- how to code-switch as appropriate to the time, place, audience, and communicative purpose.

Q. How does code-switching fit with high-stakes standardized testing?
A. In my experience, contrastive analysis of formal and informal language varieties directly supports student success on the standardized tests.

Contrastive analysis helps students interpret unspoken assumptions of the standardized tests. For example, I teach my students that standardized tests are written in formal English. This is especially important as students address questions requiring them to read several

sentences and select the one that is correct or incorrect. I explain that when the test asks the student to decide whether a sentence is "correct" or "incorrect," it is asking whether a sentence does or does not follow the patterns of the written language. I tell my students when the test asks how a sentence 'should be' written, that means that they want to know what follows the patterns of formal language. For example, given (5), a released question from the 3rd grade spring 2000 Virginia Standards of Learning test, children are prompted as in (6).

5) We are hear to help you.
6) are hear should be written
   A. is here
   B. are here
   C. is hear
   D. as it is

This is a very difficult question for students who are unable to effectively code-switch. For many vernacular speakers, answer A, "we is here," is how the sentence 'should be' – in the familiar language of the home. However, the test is asking not for the language of the home, but the language of the school. And so, students who are explicitly taught the differences between written and spoken language will easily be able to determine that answer B, "we are here," is what should be used in written work. In this way, to teach code-switching in the elementary classroom directly supports the child's success on statewide testing instruments.

Q. How do your children respond to contrastive analysis?
A. I have seen tremendous growth in my students' work and attitudes.

We have integrated code-switching into our writing process with rousing success. Before we begin editing student papers, I hand out highlighters. I ask the students to go through their papers, highlighting their successes, showing where they have succeeded in matching the patterns of Standard English. If they find a sentence still in casual patterns, they can change it to the formal pattern, and then highlight it. The wall charts the children and I have made together support their editing work. The students love these sessions, as they note all their writing successes.

Further, my students are showing both an increased conscious command of SE and an increased ability to code-switch between the written and spoken forms of language. For example, David, an African American student, read a story he had written. After working on code-switching with the class, I was surprised to find that his story, "Spy Mouse and the Broken Globe," contained several examples of vernacular language ("I won't do nothin' to you") (photo 3). Yet, his author page was fully written in Standard English. When I asked David about his use of spoken language, he responded that *he* knew how to use written language, but Spy Mouse did not.

In creating his story, David was aware not only of the contrast in voice between Spy Mouse who speaks a vernacular dialect, and himself, who is learning Standard English, but he is able to independently articulate the reasons for his language choices. This is an impressive accomplishment for any student, let alone an inner city third grader.

Next steps

Fertile next steps are evident both for Rachel and any teacher drawing on contrastive analysis in the classroom: A teacher might invite students to become investigative reporters exploring the life stories of parents and grand parents in order to write a class book for later publication and distribution to the school, families, and community. As reporters, the students attend both to the authentic voice of the people interviewed as well as to the formal standards for publishing, and thus continue deepening their understanding of how language varies by context in the real world.

Additionally, African American children's literature provides rich ground both to reach the cultural interests of the African American child and to offer examples for contrasting the language systems of AAVE and Mainstream American English. For example, Terry Meier (1998) illustrates how *Flossie and the Fox* may be used in the classroom to help students gain greater "conscious awareness of how they (and others) use language." Featuring a little girl, Flossie, who is "able to outwit a fox by pretending not to believe he's really a fox," this storyis written in both SE and AAVE, with the fox speaking the Standard and Flossie using the linguistic features characteristic of AAVE.

Describing language centered activities ranging from "writing like a fox," to "sounding word endings," Meier shows teachers how to foster children's becoming explicitly aware of the contrasts between the grammatical patterns of AAVE and SE. Children can role-play the fox's way of talking and Flossie's patterns of speech. Through role-play children are able to attend to the linguistic contrasts involved without feeling personally on the spot. Such culturally rich literature is widely available – for Native American, Cajun, Hispanic American, Appalachian cultures, etc. The resources are ample.

Conclusion

Our inner city schools are in crisis; they have been so for a long time. We received a wake-up call more than 20 years ago when a northern school system was sued for educational malpractice.

It was in 1979 that "Michigan Legal services filed suit ... on behalf of fifteen black, economically deprived children residing in a low-income housing project on Green Road in Ann Arbor, Michigan" (Smitherman 1981, p. 133). Their case, *Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*, resulted in a decision for the plaintiffs. The court found that "the suit had merit under Title 20, Sec. 1703(f), which stated that no child should be deprived of equal educational opportunity because of the failure of an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome linguistic barriers" (Labov, 1995).

The issue before us now, more than two decades later, is <u>how</u> to take "appropriate action to overcome linguistic barriers."

In this paper, we have suggested that we must revisit how we respond when students write and speak in spoken language patterns. Students don't seem to hear and absorb our corrections. Once

we recognize that students are often not producing Standard English with mistakes, but instead are writing in the patterns of the spoken language, a different and fertile approach to language arts becomes possible. We may turn from correction to contrast.

From this vantage, we may more readily foster our students learning to code-switch between the language of the home and the language of the school. Indeed, all students need a full linguistic toolbox, a toolbox well stocked with a diverse range of language styles, supported by the student's ability to code-switch between language varieties as appropriate to time, place, audience, and communicative purpose. With these skills of linguistic diversity, perhaps the schoolhouse doors will more widely open to *all*.

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